

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 16713

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, VS

SUBJ: SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

REF: BANGKOK 16638

1. AMCIT FATHER J. BERARD ARAM ARRIVED ON THE FIRST FRENCH-SPONSORED EVACUATION FLIGHT OUT OF SAIGON TO BANGKOK AUG. 12. TWO YEARS IN VIETNAM (A YEAR IN DALAT STUDYING VIETNAMESE AND A YEAR IN THE DELTA WORKING WITH VIETNAMESE REFUGEES FROM CAMBODIA, THEN THE PAST THREE MONTHS IN SAIGON TEACHING ENGLISH), HE IMPRESSES ONE AS AN INTELLIGENT OBSERVER. FOLLOWING ARE HIS OBSERVATIONS ON PRESENT-DAY SOUTH VIETNAM.

2. SAIGON. THE CAPITAL CITY IS NOW A VERY STRANGE PLACE. PEOPLE HAVE BEEN REDIVIDED INTO THE "INS" AND THE "OUTS," THE IN-GROUP BEING THOSE PREVIOUSLY IN THE VC AND THOSE NORTH VIETNAMESE WHO NOW FIND THEMSELVES IN SAIGON. THE IN-GROUP HAS A PLENTIFUL SUPPLY OF FOOD, OFTEN RIDES AROUND IN NICE CARS WITH DRIVERS, AND IS ENJOYING ITS NEW POSITION TO

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THE FULLEST. THE OUT-GROUP IS COMPOSED OF EVERYONE ELSE, STRUGGLING

TO SURVIVE, NEVER QUITE CERTAIN WHEN THE LID WILL FALL. FORTUNATELY, THE LID HAS NOT YET FALLEN AND PEOPLE ARE STILL RELATIVELY FREE IN SAIGON.

3. NORTH VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE. INFLUENCE IN SAIGON OF COMRADES FROM THE NORTH IS NOW OVERWHELMING. ADDRESSING IN PARTICULAR THE QUESTION OF THE MILITARY, SAIGON LOOKS AS IF IT CONTAINS THE ENTIRE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY. ONE SEES NVA TROOPS EVERYWHERE, AND THEY MAKE NO EFFORT TO HIDE THEIR IDENTITY. ONE OUT OF EVERY THREE TO FOUR HOUSES IS SHELTERING NORTH VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS. PEOPLE MAY TALK ABOUT REUNIFICATION, BUT SAIGON RESIDENTS ARE CONVINCED THAT NOT ONLY HAS MILITARY REUNIFICATION OCCURRED BUT THAT, GENERALLY, IT IS THE NORTH WHICH IS NOW CALLING ALL THE SHOTS.

4. TRAN VAN TRA. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF RUMORS THAT SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED TO LT. GEN. TRAN VAN TRA. ONE USED TO SEE HIM ON TELEVISION OR READ ABOUT HIM IN THE NEWSPAPER. FOR THREE WEEKS THERE HAS BEEN NO MENTION OF HIM.

5. THE FATHER DESCRIBED THE FOLLOWING INCIDENT WHICH HAPPENED TO HIM ON APPROXIMATELY JULY 20. HE WAS MAKING HIS WAY TO THE IMMIGRATION OFFICE TO SEE WHERE HIS NAME STOOD ON THE LIST OF THOSE BEING PERMITTED TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY. HE BEGAN NOTICING GROUPS OF 3-4 NVA SOLDIERS ON THE STREETS. AS HE WALKED ON, THE GROUPS OF NVA GREW MORE DENSE AND, ROUNDING A CORNER, HE CAME UPON A STREET FILLED WITH TANKS. THEN, HE SAW THE AREA AROUND THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE WAS ENTIRELY CORDONED OFF. ALL OF THIS WAS EXCLUSIVELY AN NVA AFFAIR, AND THERE WAS A VERY TENSE FEELING IN THE AIR. HE HEARD NOTHING MORE UNTIL A WEEK LATER, WHEN NEWS FILTERED OUT THAT HANOI WAS DISSATISFIED WITH TRA, WHO REPORTEDLY BELIEVED THE SOUTH WAS GETTING THE SHORT END OF THE STICK. HANOI ALLEGEDLY DISPATCHED A HIGH OFFICIAL TO SAIGON TO RUN THINGS IN TRA'S PLACE, AND TRA HIMSELF HAD REPORTEDLY MANAGED TO ESCAPE AND JOIN THE RESISTANCE IN THE HILLS. THE PRIEST SAID HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER TO BELIEVE SUCH A STORY OR NOT, BUT THE ACTIVITY THREE WEEKS AGO WAS MOST UNCOMMON.

6. THE RUMOR MILL. SAIGON IS A CITY FULL OF RUMORS ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING INSIDE THE COUNTRY. PERHAPS BASED ON ALMOST NIGHTLY MACHINEGUN FIRE AND THE MASSIVE EXPLOSION ONE MONTH AGO OF AN AMMUNITION DUMP, THERE ARE MANY RUMORS ABOUT RESISTANCE. BECAUSE

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SO MANY PEOPLE STILL WORK WAYS TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF STORIES ABOUT DEPARTURES. ONE STORY MAKING THE ROUNDS IS THAT QUITE A FEW PEOPLE PAID FOUR MILLION PIASTERS APIECE TO ESCAPE, AND LEFT ON A BARGE OUT OF VUNG TAU, ONLY TO BE TAKEN OUT TO SEA WHERE THE SOVIET FLAG WAS UNFURLED; THEY WERE THEN ALL DEPOSITED IN HAIPHONG. ACCORDING TO ANOTHER STORY, PEOPLE PAID THEIR MONEY ONLY TO BE TAKEN OUT TO SEA AND THROWN OVERBOARD. NO ONE KNOWS WHAT TO BELIEVE.

7. BISHOP OF SAIGON. AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF THE APOSTOLIC DELEGATE, THE NEXT TARGET APPEARS TO BE BISHOP QUAN OF SAIGON. ALTHOUGH NOT IN HIS PRESENT POSITION VERY LONG, BISHOP QUAN SEEMS TO BE LINKED WITH THE OLD REGIME IN THE EYES OF THE NEW, AND HE WILL PROBABLY BE ON A FLIGHT OUT VERY SOON.

8. MOVEMENT AROUND THE COUNTRY. WHILE TRAVEL INSIDE SAIGON-GIA DINH IS UNIMPEDED, TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE URBAN AREA IS QUITE COMPLICATED. FOR A VIETNAMESE TO TRAVEL TO, SAY, NHA TRANG, THREE LEVELS OF SAIGON AUTHORITIES MUST GIVE THEIR AUTHORIZATION, A VERY TIME-CONSUMING PROCESS. BECAUSE THE SAIGON MILITARY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HAS NO AUTHORITY OUTSIDE THE CITY, FINAL PERMISSION TO DEPART SAIGON BY NO MEANS INSURES THAT THE MILITARY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF NHA TRANG WILL LET THE PERSON ENTER ITS TERRITORY. STORIES CIRCULATE ABOUT PEOPLE TURNED BACK IN JUST THIS WAY, HAVING TO RETURN TO SAIGON. EACH LOCAL MILITARY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE SEEMS TO BE A LAW UNTO ITSELF. TRAVEL BY NON-VIETNAMESE WITHIN THE COUNTRY IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE; THE AUTHORITIES, EVEN IF THEY CAN DO THE NECESSARY COORDINATING AMONG THEMSELVES, WILL SIMPLY NOT GIVE SUCH AUTHORIZATION.

8. RETURNING VIETNAMESE REFUGEES. THERE IS A WIDESPREAD FEELING IN SAIGON THAT THE REFUGEES PRESENTLY IN GUAM WISHING TO RETURN HOME ARE CIA-INFILTRATED, AND THE PRG WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO MOVE VERY SLOWLY ON THEIR REPATRIATION.
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